



# Managing Upward

## About this Topic: Managing Upward



### Topic Mentors

#### Linda A. Hill

From her more than 20 years of extensive field work, Linda A. Hill has helped managers create the conditions for effective management in today's flatter and increasingly diverse organizations. She is a Professor and chair of the Leadership Initiative at Harvard Business School. She is also the author of the best-selling *Becoming a Manager* (Harvard Business School Press), and the content expert for *Coaching for Results and Managing Direct Reports*, award-winning interactive programs from Harvard Business School Publishing.

#### Katie Carlone

Katie Carlone is a consultant with 20 years of experience providing tools and workshops to enable sales and marketing professionals achieve performance goals. She specializes in analyzing training needs and developing solutions that are effective and practical such as a knowledge management tool which provides just-in-time learning and speeds new products to market.

### Topic Source Notes

#### Learn

Tony Alessandra and Phil Hunsaker. *Communicating at Work*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.

Harvard Business School Publishing. *High Performance Management*. The Interactive Manager™ Series. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1995.

Jim Temme. "Working Effectively with Your Supervisor," in *Productivity Power: 250 Great Ideas for Being More Productive*. Mission, KS: Skillpath Publications, Inc., 1993.

#### Steps

Jonathan Coates. *Managing Upwards*. Hampshire, England: Gower Publishing Limited, 1994.

## Tips

Jim Temme. "Working Effectively with Your Supervisor," in *Productivity Power: 250 Great Ideas for Being More Productive*. Mission, KS: Skillpath Publications, Inc., 1993.

## Tools

Harvard Business School Publishing. *High Performance Management*. The Interactive Manager™ Series. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1995.

## What Would You Do?

### What would you do?

David reviewed the schedule and concluded that the deadline was impossible to meet. He couldn't understand why Maria, his manager, had approved it. He also couldn't understand why she hadn't sought his input before signing off on the schedule. David thought about going ahead with the project and trying to meet the deadline, but then everyone would look bad when they failed. He was tempted to write and distribute a memo protesting the schedule before beginning the project, but that would probably antagonize Maria, and he needed her support. Surely, thought David, there must be a way to disagree with your boss without jeopardizing the project, the team, or your job.

### What would you do?

While David may worry that he might be perceived as negative or that his comments will trigger a defensive reaction, he needs to constructively address his concerns about the schedule. Otherwise, his working relationship with Maria could crumble. He should meet with Maria to let her know that he thinks the schedule is not feasible. The key to the conversation is to disagree in a constructive manner. David should explain to Maria why he thinks the schedule isn't achievable. He should outline the pitfalls and potential risks. He should then ask questions to develop a better understanding of Maria's viewpoint. At the end of the conversation, he should offer alternative solutions, rather than just raising objections. By working with Maria to come to a shared understanding of the situation, David will align his goals with hers, which will, in turn, benefit everyone.

In this topic, you'll learn how to build a better working relationship with your manager through effective communication and negotiation techniques, as well as develop strategies for understanding your manager's goals and preferred working style.

How to get the support and resources you need to excel on the job? Carefully manage your working relationship with your boss.

## Topic Objectives

This topic contains relevant information on how to:

- Develop strategies for understanding your manager's goals and preferred working style
- Build a better working relationship with your manager through effective communication and negotiation techniques

## What is managing upward?



Managing upward is a conscious approach to working with your manager toward mutually agreed-upon goals that are in the best interests of you, your manager, and the organization. It is not mere political maneuvering; rather, it is a process of influencing your manager to make decisions that benefit both of you. Managing upward facilitates the entire management process by making use of all available expertise and resources to develop solutions to problems rather than just talking about them, ignoring them, or covering them up.

## Benefits of managing upward

“ The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances; if there is any reaction, both are transformed. ”  
–Carl Jung

A strong relationship with your manager can increase your effectiveness and make your work life easier. It also helps you:

- Foster open communication, so your manager will be more open to your opinions and ideas
- Support the organization. Working as partners, you and your manager can make significant contributions to achieving results beyond your work group.

## Key Idea: What if I don't manage upward?

### Key Idea

Without a strong relationship with your manager, misunderstandings and lack of communication can divert time and attention from customers and competition. If you neglect this relationship, your goals and priorities may be at odds with those of your manager, leading to frustration and discontent for one or both parties. Communication between you and your manager may be ineffective at best, or even avoided whenever possible. And your performance appraisal rating may suffer, reducing your chances for pay increases, promotions, and career expansion. Your

manager may be forced to manage around you and begin to direct the people who report to you. A weak relationship between you and your manager can have negative consequences for the broader organization as well. Without a commitment to shared goals and objectives by you and your manager, bottom-line results for the organization as a whole may suffer. Communication breakdowns can lead to misunderstandings and poor morale, resulting in less than effective performance. Customer relationships may be impaired.

Managing upward helps keep the relationship between you and your boss positive and productive. But what if you *don't* manage upward?

## How you can drive the process



It is to your benefit to assume the primary responsibility for shaping your relationship with your manager. Such a proactive approach goes a long way toward establishing a foundation of trust and rapport, and toward creating a relationship that matches your styles and needs. From the start, let your manager know the value you place on your relationship. Don't wait for a crisis to prompt you into action.

The following guidelines can help you build a productive working relationship with your manager.

- Think about the relationship as a partnership and recognize your shared objectives.
- Come to an agreement about mutual expectations, key responsibilities, standards of performance, and measures of success.
- Ask your manager to share her own goals and objectives with you. You can then assist her in meeting her own performance commitments to the organization.
- Let your manager know what you can do for her.
- Provide information to your manager in accordance with her preferred style.
- Deliver the results your manager requires and needs. Exceed those requirements and needs whenever possible.
- Be honest and dependable.
- Be open and receptive to feedback and advice.
- Anticipate, forewarn, and share potential problems with your manager on a timely basis, before a crisis develops. Work together to create solutions that head off problems before they emerge.
- Use your manager's time wisely. Do not take up a manager's time and resources with trivial matters.

## Key Idea: Understand your manager

## Key Idea

To develop your relationship with your manager, you need to be able to see the world through her eyes. Try to identify the pressures she faces. It is critical for you to understand her perspectives and look for common ground with your own. Also, learn as much as you can about your manager's strengths, weaknesses, organizational and personal objectives, personal interests, and preferred working style. Be aware of her blind spots and trigger points, so you can respond appropriately if and when they arise.

You can learn about your manager in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Ask her openly about her management style, her likes and dislikes, and any unique needs
- Speak with other staff members and ask for their advice and feedback
- Closely observe your manager as she pursues objectives and interacts with others

How to start managing upward? See things from your boss's perspective.

## Leadership Insight: Boss management 101

There are a lot of resources on the market about how to manage people, but there are not a lot of resources about managing up, and what that means is how to manage a boss — Effective Boss Management 101.

A lot of people don't know how to do that, and then they end up not saying things, they hold things in, they feel stressed, they feel overwhelmed, and then they create alienation with the boss and resentment that ultimately can diminish their motivation and performance. So this is a really important skill.

So the first thing to know — inside scoop, very important — get to know your boss's personality. Get to know how they operate. Get to know what they like, what their work preferences are.

So for example, find out: "How do you want to be communicated to? Do you like e-mail? Do you want me to call you?" Do they like the face-to-face meetings? Or, "Do you want, even, a lot of information, or do you want me to just kind of go off and only tell you if there's a problem?"

Because some managers are micromanagers — they want to know every little detail — and some want you to be able to work autonomously. You need to know what your boss's work preferences are.

Find out your boss's personality. Do they tend to be more introverted and quiet, where you have to go and solicit their time, you have to go and just kind of drop by and keep them updated on what's happening? Or are they extroverts who are always coming by and want to be engaged with you? You need to find that out.

Are they more high-level, visionary kind of people that don't want a lot of details, or are they more of the detailed, "Tell me step by step how you're going to get there"? Those kinds of tips

are really, really important because that's going to help you develop a better relationship with your boss.

The other thing I'm going to tell you is, toot your own horn! The workplace is not a place to be modest. Now, I'm not talking about being arrogant and, "Oh, I'm just such a great manager." No. What you're going to do is you're going to very subtly get your accomplishments out there.

So the way you can do that: let's say your team has a big hit, home run. You're going to send out an e-mail blast congratulating your team on what a wonderful job they did. And that's a way of getting in front of other people, that they can see that you're doing a good job managing your team.

Also, keep what I call an accomplishments file. This is very important. Track all of your completions, all of your activities, all of your projects — and when I say, "you," you and your team's — so that you can always know exactly what you've accomplished. And at performance review time, you take those completions, those accomplishments, and you're going to put them right into your performance review.

I even suggest sending that once a month to your boss and saying, "Just thought I'd keep you in the loop. Here are all of the completions and activities over the last month." Those are really your accomplishments, but you're not going to call them that to your boss. You're just going to say "completions."

Toot your own horn, because otherwise you may not get that promotion. You may not get that bonus or those other new opportunities to stretch your own leadership skills and expand your skills. You want to be able to create those opportunities, and managing up is a critical way of doing that.

Get to know your boss' personality, communication style and preferences.

### **Lauren Mackler** **Executive Coach, Consultant and Author**

Lauren Mackler is an internationally renowned executive and life coach, bestselling author, and keynote speaker.

Over the past 25 years she's been a psychotherapist, corporate executive, leader of Arthur Andersen's Human Capital consulting practice, and a leading authority in human behavior, leadership, and professional performance.

She's the author of the international bestseller "Solemate: Master the Art of Aloneness & Transform Your Life," and contributor to "Speaking of Success" with Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard, and Jack Canfield.

Her work is frequently featured in the media, including CNN, FOX, the Wall Street Journal, the Huffington Post, the Daily Mail (London), the Boston Globe, and the Boston Business Journal. Contact Lauren at [www.laurenmackler.com](http://www.laurenmackler.com).

## **Understand yourself**





Develop a clear understanding of yourself and how you work. You are an important half of this relationship.

Ask yourself the same questions you asked about your manager. What is your personal style? What are your strengths, weaknesses, blind spots, and trigger points? Once you understand how you each work, you can learn how to maximize each other's strengths and minimize each other's weaknesses.

Keep in mind that you have more control over your own actions and reactions than you do over your manager's. Based on what you know about your manager, modify your own approach as best you can to arrive at a style of interaction that works for both of you.

## Manage expectations

Setting clear expectations is an important step in building a productive working relationship. Ask your manager to describe her expectations of you. If your manager cannot articulate her expectations, send an informal written memo outlining your understanding of those expectations and ask for feedback and agreement. Then, clarify any outstanding issues in a follow-up conversation.

If your manager responds better to a meeting than a written interchange, set up a series of informal conversations to discuss mutual roles, responsibilities, and measures of success. Try to ask for feedback on a periodic basis, so you can determine whether her expectations have changed.

It is also important for you to let your manager know what your expectations are of him or her. Clarify your expectations during a face-to-face meeting and ask for agreement.

For example, "For me to be effective on this project, this is what I need from you."

When your expectations don't match your manager's, try to negotiate an agreement that works for both of you. Periodically reassess this agreement and modify it as you need to.

## Leadership Insight: Mad dog

I was once the manager of financial planning and analysis for a pretty large company on the West Coast. The CEO of the company was a former Princeton football player who had the nickname that he carried from college that everyone in the company knew him—they didn't call him that—but they knew him as "Mad Dog."

I think he earned it in college, but it did stick with him as the CEO. In my role, I had to interact with him quite a bit. I found myself constantly sitting in his office listening to some urgent

problem that he wanted solved, or some analysis that he wanted done. Well, you know, I was not going to say anything except, "Yes sir, I'll go do it." I'd go back down and talk to my folks and we'd do the analysis and after many hours put into it, go back up and present our findings to him.

The first thing he'd say was, "That's not what I wanted done." We'd go through another round, and then we would be chasing our tails eventually. One day I was in his office and he's barking at me about something and I left the office with marching orders to come back with the analysis. I got out as far as his secretary's desk and I looked at Terry and I turned around and I went, "Nah."

I walked in and I said, "Do you know how much time we waste because you're not clear about what you're asking for and we go do all this analysis, and then you say that's not what I asked for."

He looked at me and he said, "Why do you think that's my problem?"

I said, "Well, because you're not being clear." He said, "No, if you don't stop and ask me what did I mean by that or 'I don't quite get it' and maybe we'd talk about it, is it my problem or is it your problem?"

I said, "Ahh! Good point."

Clarify and confirm what is expected before you work on a new assignment.

### **Ray Carvey**

#### **Executive Vice-President, COO and CFO, Harvard Business Publishing**

Ray Carvey is the Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Financial Officer at Harvard Business Publishing. In 1995, Ray joined the company as Chief Financial Officer.

He is currently responsible for all enterprise-wide functions, including Finance, Enterprise Technology, Creative Services, Business Intelligence, Business Process Management, and International Sales and Marketing. Ray is the company's primary liaison with Harvard Business School on all financial and reporting issues and is also responsible for Global Strategy.

Prior to joining Harvard Business Publishing, Ray was Vice President of Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer of Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries, Inc., Chief Financial Officer of Blyth Software, and Corporate Treasurer of Ingres Corporation. He also worked at Charles Schwab and Company and DiGiorgio Corporation.

He earned both his undergraduate degree and his Master of Business Administration at Boston College.

### **Promote your manager's goals**





Just as you hope and expect that your manager will support your goals, you should do what you can to support your manager's goals. You can use your influence and relationships within the organization to make your manager and the team look good.

- Increase your sphere of influence in areas that can affect your manager's goals; for example, other departments, customers, suppliers, etc.
- Recognize that you may have to relinquish some control and empower others to exert your influence most effectively.
- Engage other people from where they are, not where you would like them to be. Before trying to influence anyone, make a point of understanding his or her mindset.
- Influence the actions of others over whom you lack authority by offering advice, providing feedback, and sharing your reactions and perspectives.

### Activity: Build a good relationship with your boss

See if you know the best strategies for developing a positive relationship with your boss.

Read each strategy below. Then decide whether you would use that strategy to build a positive relationship with your boss. Answer "Yes" or "No" to each question.

Should you make it your responsibility to shape your relationship with your manager?

☐ Yes

**Correct choice.** You should assume the primary responsibility for shaping your relationship with your boss.

☐ No

**Not the best choice.** You should assume the primary responsibility for shaping your relationship with your boss.

Should you let your boss know as soon as a crisis develops?

☐ Yes

**Not the best choice.** In fact, you should inform your boss about a problem *before* it turns into a crisis.

☐ No

**Correct choice.** In fact, you should inform your boss about a problem *before* it turns into a crisis.

Should you inform your boss about both minor and major concerns in your department?

☐ Yes

**Not the best choice.** You should bring up major concerns, but avoid taking up your boss's time with minor matters.

☐ No

**Correct choice.** You should bring up major concerns, but avoid taking up your boss's time with minor matters.

Should you modify your approach to problems to better fit with your manager's style?

☐ Yes

**Correct choice.** Aligning your work style as much as possible with your manager's can help you work more productively together.

☐ No

**Not the best choice.** Aligning your work style as much as possible with your manager's can help you work more productively together.

Should you ask other staff members what they think of your manager?

☐ Yes

**Correct choice.** Talking with other staff members can help you deepen your understanding of your manager's strengths, weaknesses, organizational and personal objectives, and preferred working style.

☐ No

**Not the best choice.** Talking with other staff members can help you deepen your understanding of your manager's strengths, weaknesses, organizational and personal objectives, and preferred working style.

Should you let your manager know what you expect from him or her in order to perform your job?

☐ Yes

**Correct choice.** Effective managers know that their primary job is to empower their direct reports to do their best work possible. By letting your boss know what you need from him or her to do your job, you stand a better chance of delivering the results your manager wants.

☐ No

**Not the best choice.** Effective managers know that their primary job is to empower their direct reports to do their best work possible. By letting your boss know what you need from him or her to do your job, you stand a better chance of delivering the results your manager wants.

Should you be careful not to attempt to influence people who might affect your manager's goals?

☐ Yes

**Not the best choice.** One of the best ways to build a relationship is to promote your boss's goals. That may require you to exercise influence over individuals who may affect your boss's goals—but over whom you don't have formal authority. You can exercise influence over such individuals by offering advice, providing feedback, and sharing your perspectives.

☐ No

**Correct choice.** One of the best ways to build a relationship is to promote your boss's goals. That may require you to exercise influence over individuals who may affect your boss's goals—but over whom you don't have formal authority. You can exercise influence over such individuals by offering advice, providing feedback, and sharing your perspectives.

## Leadership Insight: Work with, not for, your boss

Managing up for me is like creating a win win with my boss. I had this big marketing project idea that came to me one day and the first thing that I did is that on my weekly telecom — which I follow as a very strong discipline for myself to talk to my boss on a very regular basis — I just picked it up and said: "This is what I have for this customer segment which means so much to us. And this idea could be a very large thing for us in terms of what it can give to us." She got onboard with me on the idea and we got started working on the proposal for that.

The proposal actually showed what we had in mind that, yes, it was going to be a high-risk, high-reward thing. So whether we do it or not is something that we really had to try to thrash out and decide. But on every weekly call, we were discussing some bits of how exactly we were developing it and what it could mean, and we really grew it into something where we felt that we could actually deliver a good job out of it.

It was important for me on every call that I align myself very well in terms of our values, in terms of our thought process of how we do business, in terms of both of us really trusting the initiatives that we have on hand and how we go out and deliver them with the team supporting us in the right way. And that's what happened in this case.

Finally, we actually had a great big event where the customers gave us beautiful feedback. And what I get out of this is very simple: Whenever I work with my boss, it is a partnership, it is not working for her, it is actually working with her.

Engaging your manager in a project is a win-win situation.

**Vineet Kapoor**  
**Director, Strategic Initiatives, Synthes Asia Pacific**

Vineet Kapoor is the Director of Strategic Initiatives for Synthes Asia Pacific. Synthes is a leading global medical device company that develops, produces, and markets instruments, implants, and biomaterials for the surgical fixation, correction, and regeneration of the skeleton and its soft tissues. Synthes Asia Pacific covers markets including Japan, China, India, and Australia.

Previously, Vineet was the Managing Director of Indian operations for Synthes, where he developed and managed a leadership team consisting of heads of Sales, Marketing, Customer Services, Operations, Finance, and HR. During this time, he directed the strategic transformation and manifold growth of the Indian business by revisiting and restructuring key areas of the business to better align them to the market dynamics.

Besides being an alum of Harvard Business School, Vineet is an associate of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and has a bachelor's degree in commerce from the University of Delhi (India). He has also completed master's level study in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) for interpersonal excellence and coaching.

## Understand your manager's communication style



You will want to communicate with managers in a way that matches their preferred style.

- Determine whether your manager is a listener or a reader and present your information accordingly. Listeners want to hear information first and read about it later. Readers like to see written reports first and then talk to you about them.
- Determine whether your manager prefers detailed facts and figures or just an overview.
- Determine the frequency of your manager's need for information. Is she someone who prefers day-to-day, hands-on involvement in your projects or someone who prefers to delegate and receive updates and progress checks as needed? Tailor your communications accordingly.

## Key Idea: Use communication to boost productivity

### Key Idea

You are responsible for creating the conditions for your own success. Let your manager know in what areas you will need help or organizational resources. Being honest with your manager about what you can and cannot handle is critical to developing a productive relationship. You must be able to explain to your manager just how you see the project being accomplished and where you may need additional help to meet that goal.

When discussing deadlines, use specific language. Do not leave room for assumptions. It is too easy to fall into the trap of agreeing to a deadline of "sometime next week," or "ASAP," or "as soon as you can get to it." These sorts of agreements most often lead to decreased productivity and major misunderstandings.

Do not be shy about communicating your interest in working on other projects or your desire to improve your skills in a specific area. Help your manager see how such an assignment could have long-term benefits for both of you and for the organization.

Identify your goals and objectives for each exchange of information to let your manager know what is important to you. Real productivity results only when both of you are working toward mutually agreed-upon goals and objectives.

Finally, ask for clarification of anything that is unclear to you. If you don't ask questions, you may do something that you wouldn't have done if you had understood the situation more clearly.

The keys to communicating with your manager? Honesty, clarity, and initiative.

## Leadership Insight: When to speak up

A number of years ago, I wrote a number of teaching cases about eBay's acquisition of a German company as a part of its globalization strategy.

In the case, you see that the founding CEO leaves, and eBay hires a new CEO consultant, Phillip, from BTG's Internet group. The new CEO comes in and discovers that the migration of the German Web site to the U.S. Web site is not going well. There are all sorts of technical challenges, and the customers are becoming very unhappy and beginning to defect.

He realizes that having a first-mover advantage is really critical to eBay Germany's success and worries that this defection is going to be a real problem, because a competitor is gaining ground.

What you see in the case is, after a number of conversations with headquarters, he concludes that he needs to fly there and speak with a group of his superiors immediately, in person, to get the kind of resources they're going to need to actually solve the problem.

So when the case ends, the question I asked the MBAs and the executives to consider is: Is this a good decision on his part, to fly to the U.S. and insist on having a meeting with a group of his superiors?

Needless to say, we have a very lively debate about that question, and you would need to know many more details to know whether it was a good or a bad decision, in some ways. But what you do see, of course, is that some people feel you have no right to ever demand a meeting of your superiors, particularly the CEO of a company. And others say, "You know what? That is his job. If it is really urgent, if it is really important, he has got to do whatever it takes to create the conditions for the success of his team."

When you see the "B" case, you discover that when he gets there, in fact, everybody is waiting for him and he makes a presentation to this group of executives and explains what he thinks they need to do if, in fact, eBay Germany is to be successful.

He makes some demands, some things that he feels are not negotiable, but he does it in a way that, basically, he makes sure that he owns the problem. He agrees that eBay Germany should pay some of the costs. He also talks about those things that are negotiable and really lays out for them, in language that they understand, using metrics that really matter to that group of people, why, in fact, they need to do what he is suggesting.

And when you see the "C" case, you discover that everything has worked out actually quite beautifully, both for eBay Germany and for Phillip and the other executives on his team. They have been very, very successful.

And there is a quote from Meg Whitman at the time, who was the CEO of the company, and she says in that quote that she is so happy that she had Phillip in that position, because Phillip was one of those executives who understood that it was important to speak up and let the boss know what was really going on. And she wished she had more executives working with her who would really share, very candidly, what was on their minds and what they needed, because then you actually could solve the problem — because as Meg Whitman pointed out, she is only human. She is not a mind-reader. She is very busy, and sometimes you've got to do some things to make sure that you get her attention so she can address what you need to have addressed.

And so I think what we all need to remember is that our bosses are only human and they are just as imperfect as the rest of us.

Ask senior leaders for their time and attention when there is an urgent issue.

**Linda A. Hill**  
**Professor, Harvard Business School**

Linda A. Hill is the Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.

She is the faculty chair of the Leadership Initiative and has chaired numerous HBS Executive Education programs, including the Young Presidents' Organization Presidents' Seminar and the High Potentials Leadership Program. She is a former faculty chair of the Organizational Behavior unit. Linda was course head during the development of the new Leadership and Organizational Behavior MBA required course.

She is the author many articles and titles including "Becoming a Manager: How New Managers Master the Challenges of Leadership." Linda has authored many articles for Harvard Business Review and is a contributor to the Harvard Business School Publishing series on "Managing Up," "Hiring," and "Becoming a New Manager."

Professor Hill's consulting and executive education activities have been in the areas of managing change, managing cross-organizational relationships, implementing global strategy, innovation, talent management, and leadership development. Organizations with which she has worked include General Electric, Reed Elsevier, and IBM.

She completed a postdoctoral research fellowship at Harvard Business School. Linda received her Bachelor of Arts in psychology from Bryn Mawr College, and both her Master of Arts in educational psychology and doctorate in behavioral sciences from the University of Chicago.

## Use listening strategies



Your skill as a listener drives your ability to get the most out of regular interactions with your manager. Try to concentrate on being an effective listener. As you listen, try to identify the messages behind the words. Note questions that you have and areas requiring further clarification before the meeting is over.

Remember to listen actively to help put yourself in your manager's shoes. Offer verbal and nonverbal feedback to your manager and withhold judgment to show your interest and empathy. Keep in mind that most managers have a tendency to provide their superiors with too little information, not too much, and they often provide it too late.

## Ask questions





You can use questions to promote a more collaborative relationship with your manager. By asking questions, you can:

- Gather new information about your manager
- Stimulate conversation and show your interest and receptivity to your manager's business objectives
- Develop a better understanding of your manager's viewpoints
- Check for agreement on critical points
- Continue to build trust and rapport
- Verify or clarify information

## Key Idea: When you disagree with your manager

### Key Idea

Many people hesitate to disagree with their managers. They worry that they will be viewed as negative or that they will trigger a defensive reaction. In fact, most managers highly value alternative perspectives—and report that they do not hear as many of them as they would like. By bringing new information or views to light, you can improve the quality of your manager's decisions. The key is to disagree in a constructive manner.

- Tie your ideas or feedback into your organization's and your manager's goals.
- Provide your manager with actionable suggestions rather than simply raising objections.
- Explain how your ideas could help avoid potential pitfalls or overcome risks.
- Give your manager some alternative choices.
- Reflect her concerns in your conversation.
- Remember that, if goals are shared, disagreements will likely not happen often.

Disagreeing constructively with your manager is an essential part of managing upward. But it takes skill and diplomacy.

## Activity: Help a manager communicate with her boss

Can you spot the effective strategies this manager uses to communicate with her boss?

Randy is the vice president of sales for a business-to-business software company. Grace, his direct report, is the sales manager for the northeast region. Grace wants to discuss a new set of business objectives with Randy.

Listen to the conversation between Grace and her boss, Randy.

**Grace:** "Randy, do you have a minute? I really wanted to discuss some of these objectives with you."

**Randy:** "Sure. Come in and have a seat."

**Grace:** "I hope I'm not interrupting. I know how busy you are these days."

**Randy:** "Not at all. You know I like to discuss these kinds of issues in person. Email just leads to too many misunderstandings."

**Grace:** "Now, one of our objectives here is to 'increase efficiency of our internal processes.' That's pretty broad. Where, specifically, do you think our internal processes are falling short?"

**Randy:** "Actually, one of the higher-ups put that language in there. I agree that it's unclear, and I've asked them to send us some clarification."

**Grace:** "Great. Now, it also says we should try to increase sales to service industry customers by 15%. Most of our salespeople aren't used to dealing with the service industry, and I think a bit of training might be necessary to reach this goal. What do you think?"

**Randy:** "I'd agree with that."

**Grace:** "I'll try to hammer out the specifics of how we'll do that training and get you a proposal some time in the next few weeks."

**Randy:** "Sounds good."

**Grace:** "Would you like something brief, with a rough estimate of cost, or something more in-depth with a detailed cost breakdown?"

**Randy:** "There's no need for the body of the proposal to be more than a page or two, but I'd like a detailed cost breakdown. It's getting harder and harder to get approval for training funds."

**Grace:** "All right. Finally, this last objective. It says we should start pushing the updates to our accounting software to all of our current clients."

**Randy:** "That's right."

**Grace:** "With all due respect, I think that might be a mistake."

**Randy:** "Really? Why's that?"

**Grace:** "It was only last year that we released the last version of the software. A lot of our clients are small businesses, and I think they'll resent the fact that we're already pushing them to invest in a new version of the software. You've said yourself that our small business customers are the backbone of our sales strategy, and I think they're the ones most likely to be alienated by this push."

**Randy:** "You make a good point. Perhaps we should rephrase the objective to make it clear that, for now, we should only be pushing the update to our larger customers who like to stay on the

cutting edge."

**Grace:** "Thanks, Randy."

**Randy:** "Not at all. I appreciate the input."

Which of the following is *not* a way in which Grace communicated effectively with her manager?

- ☐ She sought information on her manager's preferences and communicated in the style that her manager prefers.

**Not the best choice. Grace *did* do this.** Grace checked to see how Randy would prefer her to structure her proposal. She also dropped in for a face-to-face chat, which she knew was Randy's preferred style of communication.

- ☐ She asked for clarification about parts of the plan that were unclear.

**Not the best choice. Grace *did* do this.** Grace asked Randy to clarify the vague objective about improving internal processes.

- ☐ She checked for agreement on critical points.

**Not the best choice. Grace *did* do this.** Grace made sure that Randy agreed with her that the sales team would need additional training.

- ☐ When disagreeing, she tied her feedback into her organization's and her manager's goals.

**Not the best choice. Grace *did* do this.** When Grace disagreed with Randy's idea about having the sales team push the new accounting software update to their clients, she framed her disagreement in terms of the company's goal of prioritizing relationships with its small business customers.

- ☐ She used specific language when discussing deadlines and provided her manager with a few alternative choices when disagreeing.

**Correct choice.** Grace said she would get a proposal to Randy "some time in the next few weeks." This is vague, and Randy might interpret it differently from what she intended. And when Grace disagreed with Randy's idea about having the sales team push the new accounting software update to their clients, she did not provide alternatives. Instead, Randy came up with one.

## Identify priorities



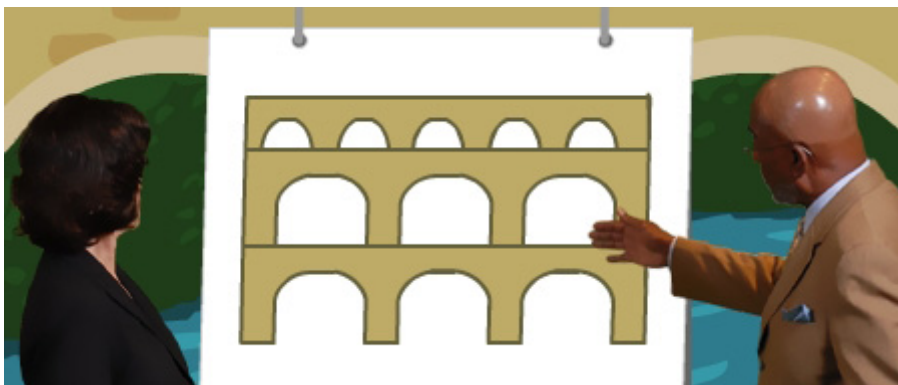
There are often times when you need to persuade your manager to view a situation from your perspective and to take action as a result. Frequently, these instances involve setting or revising priorities—deciding what you will accomplish, and when. If problems arise or you take on new responsibilities, renegotiate your priorities and due dates immediately. Do not wait until you are about to miss key deadlines or deliverables.

When you negotiate priorities, you need to balance your understanding of your work and its impact with your manager's understanding. Be sure to do the following:

- Emphasize that you are aware of the importance of all the projects for which you are responsible.
- Be clear about the time requirements of the projects you are juggling and what you can and cannot do.
- Ask for help in scheduling deadlines for new work to avoid negative impacts on other projects. Your manager will appreciate it if you prepare a suggested schedule that meets your new needs and ask for his or her feedback on it.
- Provide alternatives if your priorities do not match.

After you have reached agreement on your new priorities, follow up with an e-mail or memo to demonstrate your commitment and "seal the deal."

## Negotiate strategically



Using some of the strategies listed below can help make your negotiations with your manager as effective as possible.

- Be aware of the language you use. Learn to avoid "you"-centered language, and focus on words like "both," "we," and "I." For example, say, "I'm not clear about this point," instead of "You didn't make that clear to me." Or, "If we can meet that schedule, it will be a big benefit to both of us," instead of "*Your schedule isn't feasible.*"

- Be clear that you are acting in the best interests of your manager and the organization.
- Focus on a "win-win" approach rather than an "I win, you lose" or "you win, I lose" approach.
- Emphasize performance results that benefit both you and your manager.
- Engage your manager in helping you solve problems. Be sure you have thought through the problem and are asking for assistance, not just "dumping" the problem on your manager.
- Work with your manager as a partner. Don't put him or her into the role of adversary.
- Listen carefully to words and their meaning. Ask for clarification if there is something that you do not understand.
- Avoid becoming defensive when your manager disagrees with you or provides constructive feedback.

## Activity: Do you manage upward effectively?

Test your current upward management skills to see where your strengths lie and where you can improve.

Consider each statement. Do you generally agree or disagree with the statement?

1. I am aware of my manager's expectations of me.

☐ Agree

**Correct choice.** By knowing what your manager expects from you, you can more easily fulfill those expectations as well as determine whether any of them are unrealistic.

☐ Disagree

**Not the best choice.** By knowing what your manager expects from you, you can more easily fulfill those expectations as well as determine whether any of them are unrealistic.

2. When I negotiate with my manager, I use "we" and "I" language.

☐ Agree

**Correct choice.** By using "I" language (for example, "I'm not clear about this point"), you send the message that you're taking responsibility for your views. By using "we" language, you emphasize that you have the company's priorities in mind.

☐ Disagree

**Not the best choice.** By using "I" language (for example, "I'm not clear about this point"), you send the message that you're taking responsibility for your views. By using "we" language, you emphasize that you have the company's priorities in mind.

3. I regularly inform my manager of what I'm working on.

☐ Agree

**Correct choice.** Keeping your manager apprised of your activities makes it easier to ask him or her for assistance if you need it.

☐ Disagree

**Not the best choice.** Keeping your manager apprised of your activities makes it easier to ask him or her for assistance if you need it.

4. My manager and I avoid wasting time in unpleasant disagreements.

☐ Agree

**Not the best choice.** You should address disagreements between you and your manager as they arise, even if the process is unpleasant. Ignoring or avoiding conflicts will cause them to fester, and they will eventually damage your relationship.

☐ Disagree

**Correct choice.** You should address disagreements between you and your manager as they arise, even if the process is unpleasant. Ignoring or avoiding conflicts will cause them to fester, and they will eventually damage your relationship.

5. When I notify my manager of a problem, I first give him or her the opportunity to suggest solutions.

☐ Agree

**Not the best choice.** When bringing a problem to your manager's attention, it's more productive to suggest solutions to the problem yourself, rather than "dumping" the problem on your boss.

☐ Disagree

**Correct choice.** When bringing a problem to your manager's attention, it's more productive to suggest solutions to the problem yourself, rather than "dumping" the problem on your boss.

6. My relationship with my manager is characterized by trust and reliability.

☐ Agree

**Correct choice.** Mutual trust and reliability are hallmarks of a good relationship with your manager.

☐ Disagree

**Not the best choice.** Mutual trust and reliability are hallmarks of a good relationship with your manager.

7. I understand my manager's pressures and priorities.

☐ Agree

**Correct choice.** Seeing things from your manager's perspective helps you anticipate his or her concerns and develop goals that align with your boss's priorities.

☐ Disagree

**Not the best choice.** Seeing things from your manager's perspective helps you anticipate his or her concerns and develop goals that align with your boss's priorities.

8. My manager pitches in if I need him/her to direct one of my employees.

☐ Agree

**Not the best choice.** This is actually a sign of a poor relationship with your boss. If your boss is being forced to manage your direct reports, then you are not doing your job.

☐ Disagree

**Correct choice.** This is actually a sign of a poor relationship with your boss. If your boss is being forced to manage your direct reports, then you are not doing your job.

9. I've asked my manager openly about his/her management style and likes and dislikes.

☐ Agree

**Correct choice.** Managers appreciate it when their direct reports take pains to understand how they prefer to get information and make decisions.

☐ Disagree

**Not the best choice.** Managers appreciate it when their direct reports take pains to understand how they prefer to get information and make decisions.

10. I communicate with my manager in the least time-consuming ways possible.

☐ Agree

**Not the best choice.** You should communicate with your manager in ways that he or she prefers, whether it's by e-mail, in person, or through formal written reports. By adapting to your manager's preferences, you boost your chances that he or she will attend to what you have to say.

☐ Disagree

**Correct choice.** You should communicate with your manager in ways that he or she prefers, whether it's by e-mail, in person, or through formal written reports. By adapting



to your manager's preferences, you boost your chances that he or she will attend to what you have to say.

## Overview

This section provides interactive exercises so you can practice what you've learned. These exercises are self-checks only; your answers will not be used to evaluate your performance in the topic.

### Scenario

Assume the role of a manager in a fictional situation and explore different outcomes based on your choices (5-10 minutes).

### Check Your Knowledge

Assess your understanding of key points by completing a 10-question quiz (10 minutes).

## Scenario: Part 1

### Part 1

Jenna has recently been hired as a division manager at Nimbus Corporation, a global market research agency located in Germany. Jenna comes from Sweden, so she's just getting to know her new supervisor, Josef, the division vice president. After several weeks on the job, Jenna figures out a few things about Josef. For example, he tends to want written reports on issues before talking with her about the details. Also, he gets irritable when she asks him questions first thing Monday morning.

Jenna knows she can't communicate or collaborate effectively with him unless she understands more about him. However, she's not sure what additional things she needs to know.

What else would be valuable for Jenna to know about Josef?

- [What Josef's goals and daily pressures consist of](#)

#### Correct choice.

By knowing what Josef hopes to achieve professionally and what kinds of pressures he's under, Jenna can help support Josef's objectives with her own efforts in her group. For example, if one of Josef's goals is to trim costs in the division, Jenna could support that objective by identifying ways to streamline redundancies in her group's processes or systems. Supporting

your supervisor's goals is a major component of managing upward.

- [How Josef tends to interact with his own superiors](#)

#### **Not the best choice.**

Though understanding how Josef interacts with his superiors may shed some light on his personality, it won't generate the most important information for Jenna.

Instead, she should focus on understanding where Josef and her communication and work styles overlap and how they differ. That way, she can figure out how they might maximize each other's strengths and minimize each other's weaknesses. For example, if Josef tends to be less organized than Jenna, she could develop more detailed project-tracking systems to compensate for that trait.

- [What problems Josef experienced with Jenna's predecessor](#)

#### **Not the best choice.**

While an understanding of Josef's working relationship with Jenna's predecessor may help Jenna to avoid certain behaviors that may have bothered him, Jenna can only influence her own relationship with Josef.

In addition to understanding Josef's "hot buttons," she should assess other aspects of his communication and work style. For example, what are his *information* preferences? For example, does he prefer facts and figures, or overviews? What are his *delegation* preferences? For example, would he rather have minimal involvement in Jenna's day-to-day progress, or hands-on, daily involvement? Also, what are his key strengths and weaknesses, as well as his primary goals and objectives? By understanding these aspects of both Josef and herself, she can tailor her approach to him and design an interaction style that suits them both.

## Scenario: Part 2

### **Part 2**

Jenna continues to observe Josef to learn more about him. She also asks him openly about his management style, his likes and dislikes, and his personal and professional goals. As the weeks pass, she feels more comfortable and sure of herself in interacting with him.

One day, Josef calls Jenna into his office and assigns her a new project. He proposes a schedule that Jenna believes is unrealistic, given all her other responsibilities. She hesitates to agree to

the schedule, but is unsure of how to respond to Josef's proposed plan.

How might Jenna respond to Josef?

- "The schedule you are proposing doesn't seem feasible, given all that's going on."

**Not the best choice.**

In negotiating priorities with your supervisor, avoid "you-centered" language. Such phrasing may make some supervisors feel that you're criticizing their ideas or questioning their competence. A supervisor who feels criticized or unduly questioned may become defensive. In any conversation, defensiveness can quickly shut down communication.

- "Perhaps we both can benefit from settling on a more manageable schedule."

**Correct choice.**

"We-centered" language lets you emphasize win-win solutions to scheduling and other dilemmas. By using words like "we" and "both," you show that you're acting in the best interests of both your manager and the larger organization. Thus, your manager will be more likely to help you solve the dilemma. Also, you avoid the common error of putting your supervisor in the role of adversary.

- "I don't think the schedule is doable, given my other priorities."

**Good choice.**

By using "I-centered" language, you "own" your response to your boss's idea. Thus, you clarify that your response is just that—an opinion, rather than a negative judgment or criticism of your supervisor's proposal. "I" language therefore reduces the risk of making your manager defensive—which is one of the quickest ways to halt any conversation.

## Scenario: Part 3

### Part 3

By using words like "we" and "I" to express her thoughts about Josef's proposed plan, Jenna persuades him to reconsider the schedule he originally suggested for the new project. The two design and agree upon a deadline that they both feel comfortable with.

Several months pass, then one of Jenna's direct reports comes to her with disturbing news: For some reason, several of Nimbus's clients have switched to another agency. The client defections seem to have stopped—for now. However, Jenna worries that the problem may recur and perhaps even get worse if Nimbus does nothing about it. But she's not sure exactly what to do—and when, or even if, she should inform Josef.

How should Jenna respond to the news of the client defections?

- Weigh various possible solutions to the problem, then communicate her preferred solution to Josef

**Correct choice.**

In addition to researching a problem's causes and solutions, you should also clearly explain to your manager the pros, cons, and potential risks of each alternative solution, as well as the logic that led you to your recommended solution. By doing this, you let your manager know you've carefully considered all possible outcomes before drawing a conclusion. Using your detailed analysis, your manager can work with you to create solutions that head off problems before they turn into crises.

- Inform Josef about the problem immediately, so that they can quickly develop an effective solution together

**Not the best choice.**

Though it's good to anticipate and share potentially serious problems with your manager *before* a crisis develops, it's better to broach the subject with some proposed solutions in hand. Most managers prefer to hear about solutions or approaches, not problems or ideas. If you always go to your supervisor without having thought through problems on your own, he or she may begin perceiving your problems as complaints.

- Quickly implement a trial solution herself, to avoid taking up too much of Josef's time and resources

**Not the best choice.**

Though it's good to use your manager's time wisely, you should keep only *trivial* problems from him or her. In this case, the problem of client defections, though it doesn't constitute a crisis (yet), would pose a relatively serious concern for any company.

When presenting any problem to your manager, start by describing the problem, including an overview and its impact on your work and the organization. Then identify your preferred solution, along with alternatives. Include the pros, cons, and possible risks of each potential solution. Emphasize the benefits of your proposed solution, and let your manager know you're willing to take responsibility for the outcome.

## Scenario: Conclusion

### Conclusion

After researching and proposing a solution to the client-defection problem, Jenna presents her analysis to Josef. Together, the two design a plan that includes analyzing customer trends in their industry and fine-tuning the way Nimbus markets its services. Their approach deepens their understanding of the defection problem and keeps it from worsening.

By "managing upward"—that is, consciously influencing your supervisor to make decisions that benefit both of you—you do well for yourself, your boss, and your organization. Keys to managing upward include supporting your boss's goals, understanding his work style, negotiating priorities, and, when problems arise, presenting potential solutions as well.

## Activity: Check Your Knowledge: Question 1

Managing upward involves learning as much as you can about your manager's strengths, weaknesses, organizational and personal objectives, and personal interests and preferred working style. That sounds like political maneuvering. What's the difference between managing upward and political maneuvering?

- **No difference. Managing upward is a more correct and positive way to identify the activities involved, especially when your own motives are not totally self-serving.**

### Not the best choice.

Managing upward and political maneuvering are not the same things. Managing upward is a conscious approach to working with your manager toward mutually agreed-upon goals that are in the best interests of you, your manager, and the organization. With political maneuvering, you have only your own interests in mind.

To meet the goals of all three entities involved in managing upward—you, your manager, and the organization—you develop solutions to problems rather than just talking about them, ignoring them, covering them up, or strategizing to advance your own career.

- **The objectives are different. Managing upward is a conscious approach to working with your manager toward mutually agreed-upon goals that are in the best interests of you, your manager, and the organization. Political maneuvering rarely has all three best interests in mind.**

### Correct choice.

Managing upward is a conscious approach to working with your manager toward mutually agreed-upon goals that are in the best interests of you, your supervisor, and the organization. Political maneuvering, by contrast, involves only your own interests.

- **Managing upward is a process whereby you and your manager collaborate to move both of you up the management ladder, while political maneuvering has only your interests at heart.**

**Not the best choice.**

Managing upward is not intended to move you and your supervisor up the management ladder. Instead, it's a conscious approach to working with your manager toward mutually agreed-upon goals that are in the best interests of you, your manager, and the organization. Political maneuvering, by contrast, focuses only on your own interests.

To meet the goals of all three entities involved in managing upward—you, your manager, and the organization—you develop solutions to problems rather than just talking about them, ignoring them, covering them up, or strategizing to advance your own career.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 2

How can you best gather information about your manager's strengths, weaknesses, objectives, and preferred working style?

- [Talk with your manager, use your personal observations, ask fellow employees, and ask other managers](#)

**Correct choice.**

You can gather information about your manager's strengths, weaknesses, objectives, and preferred working style from conversations with your manager, your personal observations, fellow employees, and other managers. Using all these resources will help ensure that the information you gather is as comprehensive and accurate as possible.

- [Gather information primarily by listening carefully to your manager; other sources may not be accurate](#)

**Not the best choice.**

When you want to gather information about your manager's strengths, weaknesses, and other traits, you should use all the available resources you have—not just conversations with your manager. Thus the correct answer is: "Talk with your manager, use your personal observations, ask fellow employees, and ask other managers."

Using all these resources will help ensure that the information you gather is as comprehensive and accurate as possible.

- [For the first six months, talk with your manager and actively observe him or her. After six months, gather information from fellow employees with whom you have developed good relationships](#)

**Not the best choice.**

The way you gather information shouldn't depend on the number of months you're on the job. This answer also omits one important information source: other managers. The correct choice is: "Talk with your manager, use your personal observations, ask fellow employees, and ask other managers."

Using all these resources will help ensure that the information you gather is as comprehensive and accurate as possible.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 3

Who should make the first move in establishing a relationship with your manager? You or your manager?

- Your manager should assume the primary responsibility for establishing a relationship with you. If he or she does not make the move, allow up to three months, then assume the responsibility yourself.

**Not the best choice.**

By waiting for your manager to make the first move in establishing a relationship with you, you miss out on the opportunity to communicate the value you place on your relationship with him or her. For this reason, *you* should assume primary responsibility for shaping your relationship with your manager. A proactive approach on your part goes a long way toward establishing trust and rapport. It also lets your manager know, right from the start, how much you value the relationship.

- You should assume the primary responsibility for shaping your relationship with your manager.

**Correct choice.**

It is to your benefit to assume the primary responsibility for shaping your relationship with your manager.

A proactive approach on your part goes a long way toward establishing trust and rapport. It also lets your manager know, right from the start, the value you place on your relationship with him or her.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 4

If your manager seems unable or unwilling to articulate his or her expectations for you, what might you do?

- Send an informal written memo to your manager that outlines your understanding of those expectations and ask for feedback and agreement

**Correct choice.**

By laying out your understanding of his or her expectations and asking for feedback and agreement, you release your manager from the task of articulating expectations. Not all good managers find it easy to begin conversations about expectations. Once the dialogue has begun, outstanding issues can become part of an ongoing, informal conversation. Continue to ask for feedback on a periodic basis.



If you know that your manager responds better to meetings than to written memos, you could set up a series of informal conversations to discuss mutual roles, responsibilities, and measures of success.

- Wait a few months, then bring up the subject again

**Not the best choice.**

You need to clarify expectations as soon as possible with your manager. The best choice is to send an informal written memo to your manager that outlines your understanding of his or her expectations and ask for feedback and agreement. By laying out your understanding of his or her expectations and asking for feedback and agreement, you release your manager from the task of articulating expectations.

If you know that your manager responds better to meetings than to written memos, you could set up a series of informal conversations to discuss mutual roles, responsibilities, and measures of success.

- Bypass your manager and instead ask colleagues and other managers for suggestions on strategies that have worked in the past with your manager

**Not the best choice.**

Your manager—not others—must clarify his or her expectations. The best choice is to send an informal written memo to your manager that outlines your understanding of his or her expectations and ask for feedback and agreement. By laying out your understanding of his or her expectations and asking for feedback and agreement, you release your manager from the task of articulating expectations.

If you know that your manager responds better to meetings than to written memos, you could set up a series of informal conversations to discuss mutual roles, responsibilities, and measures of success.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 5

Which of the following should you focus on when presenting to your manager a proposed solution to a problem or an approach to an opportunity?

- The benefits to be gained by implementing this solution or approach

**Correct choice.**

When discussing a potential solution with your manager, focus on the benefits to be gained. The features of the solution, or how it will be implemented, are less important at this stage.

- The features of the solution or approach and how it might be implemented

**Not the best choice.**

At this early stage, your manager won't yet be interested in the solution's features or how it might be implemented. Instead, you should focus on the benefits to be gained by implementing

the solution or approach you're advocating. If your manager decides to support the solution or approach, that will be the time to talk about its features or implementation.

- Your role in implementing the proposed solution or approach

**Not the best choice.**

At this early stage, your manager won't yet be interested in your role in implementing the proposed solution or approach. Instead, you should focus on the benefits to be gained by implementing the solution or approach you're advocating. If your manager decides to support the solution or approach, that will be the time to talk about its features or implementation.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 6

Just as you expect your manager to support your goals, you should do what you can to support his or her goals. Which of the following is *not* a good way to use your influence within the organization to make your manager and team look good?

- Before trying to influence anyone, make a point of understanding his or her mindset

**Not the best choice.**

This actually *is* a good way to use your influence. By understanding another person's mindset, you stand a greater chance of selecting the right approach to influencing him or her. The best choice is: "Influence the actions of others over whom you have formal authority by offering advice, providing feedback, and sharing your reactions and perspectives. This is *not* a good way to use your influence, because you need strategies you would use with people over whom you *lack* formal authority.

- Increase your sphere of influence in areas that can affect your manager's goals; for example, other departments, customers, and suppliers

**Not the best choice.**

This actually *is* a good way to use your influence. By increasing your sphere of influence in areas that affect your manager's goals, you stand a better chance of helping him or her achieve those goals. The best choice is: "Influence the actions of others over whom you have formal authority by offering advice, providing feedback, and sharing your reactions and perspectives. This is *not* a good way to use your influence, because you need strategies you would use with people over whom you *lack* formal authority.

- Influence the actions of others over whom you have formal authority by offering advice, providing feedback, and sharing your reactions and perspectives

**Correct choice.**

This is *not* a good way to use your influence, because you need strategies you would use with people over whom you *lack* formal authority.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 7

What common error do most managers make when providing information to their supervisors?

- Providing too much information too often

**Not the best choice.**

Providing comprehensive information often is actually a *good* practice. Most managers tend to provide their supervisors with too little information too late. By providing timely and comprehensive information to your supervisor about any issues that affect his or her expectations of you, you build trust and teamwork.

- Providing too little information too late

**Correct choice.**

Most managers tend to provide their supervisors with too little information too late.

By providing timely and comprehensive information to your supervisor about any issues that affect his or her expectations of you, you build trust and teamwork.

- Providing too much information too late

**Not the best choice.**

Though some managers may provide their supervisors with too much information too late, this isn't the most common error. Most managers tend to provide their supervisors with too *little* information too late. By providing timely and comprehensive information to your supervisor about any issues that affect his or her expectations of you, you build trust and teamwork.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 8

One suggested strategy for communicating effectively with your manager is to determine whether your manager is more of a "listener" or a "reader." What are the implications of each of these?

- Listeners want to read about information first and then discuss it. Readers like to hear an overview first and then read the details.

**Not the best choice.**

This response reverses the implications. The correct choice is: "Listeners want to hear information first and read about it later. Readers like to see written reports first and then talk with you about them." To communicate effectively with your manager, you should adapt your approach to your manager's style preference.

- Listeners want to hear information first and read about it later. Readers like to see written reports first and then talk with you about them.

**Correct choice.**

Listeners want to hear information first and read about it later, while readers like to see written reports first and then talk with you about them. To communicate effectively with your manager, you should adapt your approach to your manager's style preference.

- Listeners are comfortable with overview language and prefer not to have to read details before discussing an issue. Readers want to have a written description, even if it is informal, in front of them at all times.

#### Not the best choice.

This response presents incorrect information about readers. The correct choice is: "Listeners want to hear information first and read about it later. Readers like to see written reports first and then talk with you about them." To communicate effectively with your manager, you should adapt your approach to your manager's style preference.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 9

Below are statements a manager might say when negotiating a work assignment with his or her supervisor. Which statement would you *avoid* making?

- "If you want me to do the analysis at the same time, you'll have to give me three additional days after the survey."

#### Correct choice.

This statement uses "you-centered" language ("You'll have to"), which is not advisable in negotiating with your manager. "I-centered" or "we-centered" language ("I'll/We'll need three additional days after the survey") gets better results.

- "If we need to include the analysis, we'll have to budget three additional days after the survey."

#### Not the best choice.

You actually would *want* to phrase a statement this way, because it uses "we-centered" language, which gets better results during negotiations with your manager. The statement you would *avoid* making is "If you want me to do the analysis at the same time, you'll have to give me three additional days after the survey." This statement uses "you-centered" language ("You'll have to"), which is not advisable in negotiating with your manager.

- "To include the analysis at the same time, I'll need three additional days after the survey."

#### Not the best choice.

You actually would *want* to phrase a statement this way, because it uses "I-centered" language, which gets better results during negotiations with your manager. The statement you would *avoid* making is "If you want me to do the analysis at the same time, you'll have to give me three additional days after the survey." This statement uses "you-centered" language ("You'll have to"), which is not advisable in negotiating with your manager.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 10

When presenting a problem to your supervisor, you've identified the problem and explained why it's a problem. What should you do next?

- [Pause and ask your manager about possible solutions or approaches](#)

**Not the best choice.**

Most managers prefer to hear about your proposed solutions or approaches, not your problems. If you don't provide a reasonable solution or a creative approach, your manager may hear your problem as simply another complaint. Therefore, the best choice is to identify your proposed solution or approach as soon as you have described the problem.

- [Identify your solution or approach](#)

**Correct choice.**

In presenting a problem (or an opportunity), it's important to identify your proposed solution or approach. Most managers prefer to hear about your proposed solutions or approaches, not your problems.

- [Ask whether your manager has any questions](#)

**Not the best choice.**

You may eventually ask whether your manager has any questions, but this isn't the step you take next. Instead, after presenting a problem and explaining why it's a problem, you should identify your solution or approach. Most managers prefer to hear about your proposed solutions or approaches, not your problems. If you don't provide a reasonable solution or a creative approach, your manager may hear your problem as simply another complaint.

## Check Your Knowledge: Results

### Your score:

### Steps for developing a relationship with your manager

#### 1. Understand your manager's and your own styles and perspectives.

Seek to understand your manager's perspective.

- Ask your manager openly about his or her management style, likes and dislikes, and any unique needs.
- Speak with other staff members, and ask for their advice and feedback.
- Closely observe your manager as he or she pursues objectives and interacts with others.

Then, ask yourself the same kinds of questions you asked about your manager. What is your personal style? What are your strengths, weaknesses, blind spots, and trigger points?

Based on what you know about your manager, modify your own approach as best you can to arrive at a style of interaction that works for both of you.

## **2. Determine how you will work together.**

It is your responsibility to take the lead in laying out the ground rules and processes for your working relationship. These should include the following:

- Mode and frequency of communication
- The limits of your decision-making authority—which decisions can you make on your own, and which do you need to run by your manager?
- How you will let each other know about potential problems, and how you will approach them
- Mechanisms and timing for exchanging feedback.

## **3. Agree on goals and expectations.**

- Set up a series of informal conversations to discuss roles, responsibilities, and measures of success.
- If your manager prefers to communicate in writing, send an informal written memo that outlines your understanding of his expectations and your expectations of him, and ask for feedback. Then, clarify any outstanding issues in a follow-up conversation.
- Listen actively and ask questions to develop a better understanding of your manager's viewpoints, and check for agreement on critical points.
- Be as specific as you can in defining deadlines and deliverables. Avoid the temptation to use vague language.
- When your expectations don't match your manager's, try to negotiate an agreement that works for both of you.

## **4. Revisit your goals and interaction process, and revise as needed.**

Meet with your manager periodically to review goals and expectations, and determine whether they have changed or need to be changed. Similarly, you should discuss your relationship explicitly and exchange feedback on what works and what doesn't work. Use what you learn to refine your interaction process, and check back within a defined period of time to see if your refinements have been effective.

## **Steps for presenting problems or opportunities up**

### **1. Describe the problem or opportunity to your manager.**

- Provide a general overview of the problem, and show the specific impact that the problem is having on your work and on the organization's goals. If you have identified an opportunity, show the potential benefits if the opportunity is pursued.
- Explain that by solving this problem or seizing this opportunity, work can proceed more smoothly toward mutually agreed-upon objectives and the organization will benefit significantly.
- Position the problem or opportunity in terms of your manager's goals, criteria for success, and value to him or her.

### **2. Identify your solution or approach.**

- Explain how you have already tried to solve the problem and what you have learned from those attempts.

- Recommend a specific solution or approach, along with alternatives to provide your manager with options. Most managers prefer to hear about your solutions or approaches, not your problems or ideas. Without your reasonable solution or creative approach, your manager may hear your problem or opportunity as simply another complaint or wild idea.
- Clearly define each possible alternative along with pros and cons and potential risks or barriers. Explain the logic that led you to your recommended solution or approach. You want your manager to be aware that you carefully considered all possible outcomes before drawing a conclusion.

### **3. Explain the implications of the solution or approach.**

- Consider the impact that your solution or approach will have on yourself and others, including your manager and the organization as a whole.
- Avoid focusing on everyone else involved and forgetting about yourself or, conversely, focusing on yourself and forgetting about everyone else.
- Be sure to make explicit that the problem and solution, or opportunity and approach, can have far-reaching effects on the goals of the organization.

### **4. Discuss the benefits of your solution or approach.**

- Focus your discussion on the benefits to be gained from implementation of your solution to the problem or approach to the opportunity. The specific features of the solution, or how it will be implemented, are less important at this stage.
- Give concrete examples of the kinds of benefits your proposed solution or approach could provide to your manager and to the organization.
- If you have tested your solution or approach on a small scale with good results, say so. This can be a strong point in gaining commitment for your solution.
- Be prepared to discuss how you will address risks or barriers that may be of concern to your manager.

### **5. Accept responsibility for the outcome.**

- Let your manager know that you are willing to take the responsibility for the outcome of your solution or approach. This is an important part of your discussion and demonstrates your commitment to ensuring success.
- Make a commitment to exactly what you can and cannot do, and suggest areas where you may need assistance or additional resources. This method leaves room for negotiation.
- Actively engage your manager in analyzing the problem or opportunity and in developing a final action plan.

## **Tips for working effectively with your manager**

- Make your manager a partner. Don't put him or her into the role of adversary.
- See the world through your manager's eyes and position ideas from a manager's viewpoint.
- Use your manager's time and resources selectively.
- Be honest and dependable.
- Make your manager and your organization look good by achieving or exceeding goals and objectives.
- Openly acknowledge the value of your manager's input and leadership when you successfully address a problem or seize an opportunity.
- Keep your manager informed. Provide a "heads up" so that he or she is informed about a crisis before it happens.
- Communicate the results of solutions or approaches, so he or she can share them with others.

## **Tips for negotiating your needs**



- Be direct. Ask for what you want and need.
- Avoid arguments. Focus on jointly generating options acceptable to both of you.
- Be aware of the limits of logic and suggest creative alternative solutions or approaches.
- Repeat your expectations clearly.
- Don't try to overjustify your needs.
- Discuss deadlines realistically.
- Use "I" statements to state what you can do and what you need to do it. Avoid "you" statements. Use "we" statements to help define a mutually agreed-upon approach.
- Focus on the goal of achieving a common perspective with your manager.
- Focus on a "win-win" approach rather than an "I win, you lose" or "you win, I lose" approach.
- Thank your manager for his or her support and interest in alternatives.

## Worksheet for understanding your manager

Worksheet for Understanding Your Manager	
By answering the following questions, you will be better prepared to communicate effectively with your manager.	
Question	Notes
1. What is my manager's communication style? Reader or listener?	
2. Is my manager a detail-oriented person who prefers facts and figures or a big picture person who prefers just an overview?	
3. Does my manager prefer to delegate tasks and have minimal involvement in day-to-day progress or to have hands-on, day-to-day involvement in my project?	
4. What are my manager's key strengths?	
5. What are my manager's primary weaknesses?	
6. What are the hot buttons or triggers that prompt quick reactions?	
7. What is my manager's overall mind-set and view of the world? (e.g., optimist or pessimist, team player or alone-er?)	
8. What are my manager's important goals and objectives?	

© 2006 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.

## Worksheet for understanding yourself

Worksheet for Understanding Yourself	
By answering the following questions, you will gain a better understanding of yourself. This helps you communicate more effectively with your manager.	
Question	Notes
1. What is my communication style? Reader or listener?	
2. Am I a detail-oriented person who prefers facts and figures or a big picture person who prefers just an overview?	
3. Do I perform best with a manager who prefers to delegate tasks and has minimal involvement in day-to-day progress, or do I prefer my manager to be more hands-on with day-to-day involvement in my projects?	
4. What are my key strengths and areas of expertise?	
5. What are my primary weaknesses or blind spots?	
6. What are my hot buttons or triggers that prompt quick reactions?	
7. What is my overall mindset and view of the world? (e.g., optimist or pessimist, team player or alone?)	
8. What are my important goals and objectives?	
9. How can I align my wants and needs with those of my manager so that we are both satisfied?	
© 2006 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.	

## Worksheet for monitoring the effectiveness of your relationship with your manager

Worksheet for Monitoring the Effectiveness of Your Relationship with Your Manager	
Complete this worksheet every few months to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of your relationship with your manager.	
Question	Notes
1. Am I aware of my manager's specific and general expectations of me?	
2. Are these expectations fair and realistic?	
3. Is my manager aware of what I expect in return and what resources I might need?	
4. How much does my manager know about what I have been doing for the past few months? If he or she knows little, how can I correct that?	
5. How well do we get along on a daily basis? Are there conflicts or problems that need to be addressed?	
6. Is our relationship built on trust and reliability? Have I been a trustworthy partner? Do I meet commitments? Am I supportive of my manager in talking to others?	
7. Have I been proactive and taken the primary responsibility for managing this relationship?	
8. What is it that I could do differently to more effectively support my manager?	
© 2006 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.	

## Worksheet for negotiating with your manager

<i>Worksheet for Negotiating with Your Manager</i>
What is the issue, problem, or opportunity prompting the need for negotiation? -----
What are the risks and benefits for each of the solutions or approaches I am suggesting? -----
What are my goals for this negotiation? -----
What do I think my manager's goals are? -----
How can I try to influence my manager's mindset? How can I position my solution or suggestions from his or her point of view? -----
What benefits can I assure my manager will result from my suggestions or proposal? -----
What are the results I expect from this negotiation? -----
What are alternative solutions I can present if my initial solutions are not acceptable to my manager? -----
<small>© 2006 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.</small>

## Why Develop Others?

"At the end of the day, you bet on people, not strategies."

Larry Bossidy

Former CEO, AlliedSignal

In today's global business environment, markets and regulations change quickly. Competitors constantly innovate. Technological changes are the norm.

In order to outmaneuver the competition and meet the demands of the moment, organizations must be agile. They must execute flawlessly. And they must transform themselves continuously.

Are your leaders ready?

Dr. Noel M. Tichy

Professor

University of Michigan Ross School of Business

We have now entered an era where I don't care what industry you're in, you need leaders who can make decisions, make judgment calls at every single level. All the way down to the interface with the customer.

If you go to a company like Google or any of the high tech companies, a lot of the innovation that Amazon does is happening right at the front line. Go ahead, try it, put it out there, we'll learn from it. That cannot happen if the senior leadership doesn't have a commitment to both develop the leadership capability, but develop the business through engaging people at all levels of the organization.

### Becoming a teaching organization

I like to tell parents that they cannot delegate their responsibility to develop their children. And I think it is the same in an organization. Day in and day out the person that has the biggest impact on people in the organization is the next level above and the associates around and below. And so to build a learning organization I say is not enough. Learning could be, you know we are learning cooking, we are learning this or that, but teaching organizations, when I learned something, I have a responsibility to teach my colleagues.

So everybody takes responsibility for generating new knowledge and it is not enough to be a learner, you then have to translate it into teaching.

### The Virtuous Teaching Cycle

The role of a leader is to ensure that the people who work for them and around them are better every day. There's only one way to make people better. It's to teach them, learn from them, create what I call "virtuous teaching cycles", not command and control.

A virtuous teaching cycle is teach learn, teach learn. And the leader has a responsibility for reducing the hierarchy, for having a point of view to start the discussion, but then to be responsible to hear everyone's voice, get everyone involved in a disciplined way. It is not a free for all. But it is the leader's responsibility to create that virtuous teaching cycle.

A wonderful example of virtuous teaching cycle is the program that Roger Enrico ran at Pepsi, where every one of the 10 vice presidents comes with a business project.

Roger Enrico gets smarter as result of five days with 10 vice presidents, because he's learning from them. He needs to lower the hierarchy. He needs to be open to learning. And in turn, the people participating need to be energized and empowered to come up and engage in problem solving.

Another example is at Best Buy, where every morning in the stores you would bring 20 associates or so together and they would review the profit and loss statement from the day before, what we learned from the different customer segments in our stores, what we can do to improve our performance this day. And they do that every single day. The store manager was learning mostly from the associates on the floor.

That was a virtuous teaching cycle were everybody is teaching everybody, everybody is learning and the result has been an incredible result at Best Buy.

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

- Harvey S. Firestone

Founder, Firestone Tire and Rubber Co

There are clear advantages to leader-led development.

But for many leaders, taking on teaching, coaching, and other development responsibilities can seem daunting. You might avoid taking on these roles due to lack of time, resources, or your own lack of comfort with this role.

The following tips and resources can help you impart valuable learning to your team every day.

To develop others...

- Start with a Teachable Point of View

The first requirement of being able to develop other leaders is to have what I call a teachable point of view. I often give the example of, if I ran a tennis camp and you just came to day one of the tennis camp, I better have a teachable point of view on how I teach tennis. So you are standing there looking at me and it has got four elements. One, the ideas, well how do I teach the backhand, the forehand, the serve, rules of tennis. Then if I am a good tennis coach, I have a set of values. What are the right behaviors I want, how do I want you to dress, how do I want you to behave on the tennis court.

But if that's all I have, what do I do? Show you a power point presentation and then expect you to hit 500 backhands, 500 serves, run around for eight hours. I have to have a teachable point of view on emotional energy. How do I motivate you to buy in to the ideas and values?

On one end of the spectrum it could be I threaten you with corporal punishment, the other I can give you stock options, I can make you feel good about yourself, I can help you develop as a human being, what motivates you.

And then finally, how do I make the tough judgment calls, the yes/no, decisions as the tennis coach, the ball is in, the ball is out. I don't hire consultants and set up a committee, it is yes/no. And the same with running a business, what are the products, services, distribution channels, customer segments that are going to grow top line growth and profitability of the organization.

What are the values that I want everyone in the organization to have, how do I emotionally energize thousands of people, and then how do I make the yes/no, judgments on people and on business issues. So the fundamental building block of being able to develop other leaders is to have that teachable point of view just like the tennis coach.

To develop others...

- Lead with questions

Questions are hugely important because you want to create dialogue and again, what I call a virtuous teaching cycle where the teacher learns from the students and vice versa. Which means everybody ought to be free to ask whatever is on their mind, whatever it will take to get clarity and understanding, but it is not the leader just coming in and freeform asking questions. I believe the leader has a responsibility for framing the discussion, for having as best they can a teachable point of view, they may need help from their people in flushing it out, but they need to set the stage but then it has to be a very interactive, what I call virtuous teaching cycle environment, teach learn, teach learn, teach learn.

To develop others...

- Make it part of your routine

A good example to me of an outstanding leader developing other leaders is Myrtle Potter who at the time I am commenting was Chief Operating Officer of Genentech running the commercial side of the business. And she would take time at the end of every single meeting and do some coaching of the whole team on how we could perform as a team better, and then she would often take individuals and say, could we spend 10 minutes over a cup of coffee, I want to give you some feedback and coaching on that report that you just presented on or how you are handling a particularly difficult human resource issue, but it was part of her regular routine. And I think the challenge for all of us as leaders is to make that a way of life and it is built into the

fabric of how we lead and it is not a one off event, three times a year. It is happening almost every day.

To develop others...

- Make it a priority

One of the biggest challenges in getting people kind of on this path is to overcome some of their own resistance, either fear or the way I view the world I don't have time for this, everybody can make time. Roger Enrico is CEO of Pepsi. He didn't have time to go off for a week at a time and run training sessions. He had to readjust his calendar. So it requires you to look in the mirror and say, is this important. If it is important, of course I can make the time. Then I have to get over my own anxiety on how well I can do it, but it is a commitment to get on the path that says: this is how I am going to drive my own performance and the performance of my colleagues.

To develop others...

- Learn to teach

I think the biggest mistake is to assume you are going to be good at it right off the bat. It is like learning anything else. First time you go out and try and play tennis, good luck. But you got to stay with it and you got to engage your people in helping make you better and them better. And so it is a journey you need to get on, not I am going to do it perfectly when I start out.

If you want to be a great leader who is a great teacher, it's very simple. You have got to dive into the deep end of the pool. But you've got to dive into the pool with preparation. I don't want you drowning. I want you succeeding. It is extraordinarily rewarding for most human beings to teach others. I think once you can turn that switch on, it is self perpetuating. You get a lot of reinforcement, your team is better. You perform better because your performance goes up and it becomes this virtuous teaching cycle.

Your opportunity to develop others

We've heard why developing others can drive greater business results, and how to make the most of your leader-led development efforts. The materials provided in Develop Others enable you to create personalized learning experiences for YOUR team within the flow of their daily activities. Use the guides and projects to engage your team quickly. And to explore how key concepts apply to them in the context of their priorities and goals.

The value of teaching is the performance of the organization is totally dependent on making your people smarter and more aligned every day as the world changes. In the 21st century we are not going to get by with command and control. We are going to have to get by with knowledge creation. The way you create knowledge in an organization is you create these virtuous teaching cycles where you are teaching and learning simultaneously, responding to customer demands and changes, responding to changes in the global environment. My bottom line is if you're not teaching, you're not leading.

A leader's most important role in any organization is making good judgments — well informed, wise decisions about people, strategy and crises that produce the desired outcomes. When a leader shows consistently good judgment, little else matters. When he or she shows poor judgment nothing else

matters. In addition to making their own good judgment calls, good leaders develop good judgment among their team members.

**Dr. Noel M. Tichy****Professor, University of Michigan Ross School of Business**

Dr. Noel M. Tichy is Professor of Management and Organizations, and Director of the Global Business Partnership at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. The Global Business Partnership links companies and students around the world to develop and engage business leaders to incorporate global citizenship activities, both environmental projects and human capital development, for those at the bottom of the pyramid. Previously, Noel was head of General Electric's Leadership Center at Crotonville, where he led the transformation to action learning at GE. Between 1985 and 1987, he was Manager of Management Education for GE where he directed its worldwide development efforts at Crotonville. He currently consults widely in both the private and public sectors. He is a senior partner in Action Learning Associates. Noel is author of numerous books and articles, including:

For more information about Noel Tichy, visit <http://www.noeltichy.com>.

## Share an Idea

Leaders are in a unique position to recognize the ideas and tools that are most relevant and useful for their teams. If you only have a few minutes, consider sharing an idea or tool from this topic with your team or peers that is relevant and timely to their situation.

For example, consider sending one of the three recommended ideas or tools below to your team with your comments or questions on how the idea or tool can be of value to your organization. By simply sharing the item, you can easily engage others in important conversations and activities relevant to your goals and priorities.

[What if I don't manage upward?](#)

[Steps for developing a relationship with your manager](#)

[Worksheet for monitoring the effectiveness of your relationship with your manager](#)

To share an idea, tip, step, or tool with your comments via e-mail, select the EMAIL link in the upper right corner of the page that contains the idea, tip, step, or tool that you wish to share.

## Discussion 1: Clarifying manager-team expectations

In any partnership, it's crucial that the participants understand what each expects from the other. Without this understanding, the partners may work at cross-purposes and experience uncomfortable and unproductive misunderstandings.

This applies to your partnerships with members of your team as you seek to accomplish important goals together. Your team members may have incorrect assumptions about what you expect of them — such as what their goals are, who's responsible for what, or how their success will be measured. Perhaps you haven't taken time to communicate your expectations. Likewise, your team members may neglect to communicate what they need from you.

That's why it's vital to talk openly about expectations with your team members. And because expectations can change depending on what's going on in your organization, you'll want to have this conversation periodically not only with new direct reports but with longer-standing employees.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about what each member of the manager-team partnership expects of the other.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Clarifying Manager-Team Expectations](#)

[Discussion Guide: Clarifying Manager-Team Expectations](#)

[Discussion Slides: Clarifying Manager-Team Expectations \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

*Note:* Consider pairing up with a peer manager to co-lead the discussion for your combined teams. That way, the discussion won't center only on how team members can work effectively with just one leader.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

## Discussion 2: Fostering manager-team communication

As you work with members of your team to accomplish important goals together, communication between you and your team can make or break this partnership. In particular, you and your team need to know how to negotiate together, how to disagree productively, and how to share information effectively.

Weak communication on any of these fronts can erode your group's productivity and stall progress toward your collective goals. For instance, if you and your team can't negotiate together, confusion could arise over a project's deadline or desired outcomes. If you can't disagree productively, team members may stop offering their ideas. And if you and your team don't share information effectively, neither party can make informed decisions.

That's why it's vital to talk openly about how you and your team — new hires as well as longstanding employees — might strengthen your communication.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about how to negotiate together, disagree productively, and share information effectively.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Fostering Manager-Team Communication](#)

[Discussion Guide: Fostering Manager-Team Communication](#)

[Discussion Slides: Fostering Manager-Team Communication \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

*Note:* Consider pairing up with a peer manager to co-lead the discussion for your combined teams. That way, the discussion won't center only on how team members can communicate effectively with just one leader.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.



## Start a Group Project

Just like any change effort, successfully incorporating new skills and behaviors into one's daily activities and habits takes time and effort. After reviewing or discussing the concepts in this topic, your direct reports will still need your support to fully apply new concepts and skills. They will need to overcome a variety of barriers including a lack of time, lack of confidence, and a fear of making mistakes. They will also need opportunities to hone their skills and break old habits. To help ensure their success, you can provide safe opportunities for individuals and your team as a whole to practice and experiment with new skills and behaviors on the job.

For example, to encourage the adoption of new norms, you can provide your team members with coaching, feedback, and additional time to complete tasks that require the use of new skills. Management approaches such as these will encourage team members to experiment with new skills until they become proficient.

Group learning projects provide another valuable technique for accelerating team members' development of new behaviors. A group learning project is an on-the-job activity aimed at providing team members with direct experience implementing their new knowledge and skills. Through a learning project, team members discover how new concepts work in the context of their situation, while simultaneously having a direct and tangible impact on the organization.

The documents below provide steps, tips, and a template for initiating a group learning project with your team, along with two project recommendations for this topic.

Download resources:

[Tips for Initiating and Supporting a Learning Project](#)

[Learning Project Plan Template](#)

[Learning Project: Build a Strong Relationship with Your Manager](#)

[Learning Project: Present Problems and Opportunities to Your Manager](#)

## How Can I Do a Better Job of Managing Up?

[Marshall Goldsmith. "How Can I Do a Better Job of Managing Up?" \*Harvard Management Update\*, February 2008.](#)

[Download file](#)

### Summary

It's a simple fact: if you can influence the key decision makers in your organization, you can make a positive difference. Wielding this influence is the essence of managing up. To do it more effectively, says world-renowned executive coach Marshall Goldsmith, follow these three steps. First, take responsibility for achieving results. Second, relate to the larger needs of the organization, not just to the needs of your unit or team. And third, back up your pitch with a realistic view of the costs.

## Managing Your Boss

John J. Gabarro and John P. Kotter. "Managing Your Boss." *Harvard Business Review*, January 2005.

[Download file](#)

### Summary

In this classic HBR article, first published in 1980, John J. Gabarro and John P. Kotter advise readers to devote time and energy to managing their relationships with their bosses. The authors aren't talking about showering supervisors with flattery; rather, they ask readers to understand that the manager-boss relationship is one of mutual dependence. Bosses need cooperation, reliability, and honesty from their direct reports. Managers, for their part, rely on bosses for making connections with the rest of the company, for setting priorities, and for obtaining critical resources. It only makes sense to work at making the relationship operate as smoothly as possible. Successfully managing your relationship with your boss requires that you have a good understanding of your supervisor and of yourself, particularly strengths, weaknesses, work styles, and needs. Once you are aware of what impedes or facilitates communication with your boss, you can take actions to improve your relationship. You can usually establish a way of working together that fits both of you, is characterized by unambiguous mutual expectations, and makes both of you more productive and effective. No doubt, some managers will resent that on top of all their other duties, they must also take responsibility for their relationships with their bosses. But these managers fail to realize that by doing so, they can actually simplify their jobs, eliminating potentially severe problems and improving productivity.

## Surviving the Boss from Hell

David Silverman, Gini Graham, Brad Gilbreath, and Lauren Sontag. "Surviving the Boss from Hell." *Harvard Business Review*, September 2009.

[Download file](#)

### Summary

A project manager with a talent for creating dashboards, David is frustrated by his repressive, micromanaging boss, Thaddeus—aka "the Commodore." Thaddeus drones on about the high point of his own (now stalled) career, calls unnecessary last-minute meetings, and tries to one-up his direct reports—while bending over backward to honor an intern's filing job. David has managed to impress Irving, the EVP of Finance Europe, enough to receive a job offer, but it's a lateral move with no increase in pay. What should he do? Three experts comment on this fictional case study. He should stay where he is, at least for now, says Gini Graham Scott, an author, consultant, and motivational speaker. Meanwhile, he can form a supportive network of colleagues, make a special effort to find pleasures outside of work, and even attempt—non-confrontationally and subtly—to improve his relationship with the Commodore. Brad Gilbreath, formerly a human resources manager and now an assistant professor at Colorado State University, advises David to escape from Thaddeus in the interest of his own health. Research shows that bosses' behavior can lead to high blood pressure or psychiatric problems in their subordinates. By learning how to set boundaries, says Lauren Sontag, the president of a consulting firm specializing in executive coaching, leadership development, and talent management, David might be able to improve his relationship with Thaddeus. But accepting Irving's offer would provide more room to maneuver and advance. Alternatively, David might propose a dashboard "center of excellence" to serve both Thaddeus and Irving.

